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Launch of the BMA Chair in Indigenous Engagement

18 April 2012

**Building 32 Courtyard (level 1)
CQUniversity Australia
Rockhampton**

Bronwyn Fredericks

I begin by offering a formal acknowledgement to the Darumbal people. I thank Wade Mann for his Welcome as a member of the Darumbal people and the Dance Troupe for dancing on this day. I thank the other people who are here today from other Country that surrounds and borders Darumbal Country and on which this university also works: the Woppaburra; Gungalou; Bidjara; Gurang Gurang; Birri Gubba; and others. I thank the members of the Fitzroy Basin Elders for supporting this event.

I start by telling you that as I walked along side my garden path to my car this morning, I spotted Buderoo: a small green tree frog looking up at me. The Buderoo is a totem of the Darumbal people and in my case this morning as I stepped around him, I was offered a humbling reminder that for the last 20 years I have lived on and off this Country, undertaking my studies and working with communities in Central Queensland. I am back here again.

I now stand before you as the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Indigenous Engagement) and the BMA Chair of Indigenous Engagement at CQUniversity. I say to you that this initiative will contribute to making a difference in Central Queensland.

In 2007 the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (also known as NACCHO) combined with Oxfam to lead organisations, governments, institutions and industry in a process to find solutions and strategies to improve the health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. They signed an agreement binding them together, to take a stand and to take real action. This campaign was called 'Close the Gap'. Since the original document was signed the will and sentiments behind the campaign have been expanded to many other areas including employment and workforce initiatives, housing and participation in training and education.

This BMA and CQUniversity initiative offers opportunities to work within this Close the Gap agenda to make a real difference, a tangible difference from multiple angles. I will speak a little to this.

An education does offer a direct outcome to the lives of Indigenous individuals through providing career options, an increased income, choices and the other aspects that come from this. Research tells us that this is fact. We can also see the lived reality being played out here within the region, where people with an education either from university or TAFE have multiple choices, can more readily take up opportunities and earn higher incomes.

All of this gives people a sense that they can and are capable of making decisions for themselves and that they can take responsibility for themselves and that they can bring about greater direction in their own lives as determined by themselves.

For Indigenous people there are also the benefits that an education brings to the family. There is more money and resources to be shared, and more capacity to make collective choices and participate in options in the present and in the future. Families can benefit from confidently knowing they can buy their medicine if ill, fix the car if it breaks down, may be take a holiday or two or change jobs if they want to.

If that individual is engaged in Indigenous organizational life the broader Indigenous community also benefits. The knowledge and skills that that person gained through education combines with the knowledge and skills of other Indigenous people. In this way the best of knowledge can be combined for Indigenous people and they can collectively work together with added confidence.

I also want to make a point here that when Indigenous people graduate from a university or TAFE we are not only a teacher, nurse, an engineer or scientist or a researcher. We are a nurse and Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, an engineer and Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and in my case I was a teacher and Aboriginal and most recently a researcher and Aboriginal. We value add to the environments that we work and live within. We can do all the things that the job requires us to do and are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. It makes sense then that having more of us in work places value adds to those work places.

Through Indigenous people being educated, non-Indigenous people also begin to know us in different ways. Rather than predominantly being in an unequal service relationship to us, that is helping us, assisting us and working to address our disadvantage, when we are educated and participating in the work place as a teacher, engineer, nurse, scientist or researcher, more non-Indigenous people become our colleagues, our peers and co-workers. This also takes some re-thinking and re-adjustment from all of us: both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

This is the practical side of Closing the Gap and of Reconciliation.

As this agreement is signed off this afternoon between BMA and CQUniversity, we through our respective organisations make a firm commitment to take a stand and take action through working together for increased education outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. I am hoping that organisations, industry and government will work with us in this commitment and that we add to what has taken place already and that we can collectively share in making real difference, and achieve real outcomes.

As the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Indigenous Engagement) and BMA Chair of Indigenous Engagement, I will lead this process within the university. I will be calling on some of you to work with me in this commitment: to turn will and sentiment into willingness and action.

In closing, I turn back to Buderoo, the green tree frog. As the wet season comes and goes and we hear much noise from Buderoo, I am hoping that he doesn't just sit and remind us of who we are and what we were going to do, but that all the croaks are in recognition and a sign of his pleasure of what we are collectively doing to make a real difference not only for the education outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people but in Closing the Gap.